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ABSTRACT

Curriculum and instruction planners on the university campuses must continue in their attempts to provide quality in meeting the learners educational, vocational, and personal-social needs. Issues examined are: (1) planning courses and curricula to meet the needs of students; (2) the planning objectives in specific fields; (3) advantages and disadvantages of the lecturing methods; (4) group discussion; and (5) whether or not a teacher is needed. Shifts are necessary in approaches to teaching and evaluation to meet the needs of students. Needed is: (1) more student evaluation of faculty; (2) more emphasis on combining the resources of public and private institutions; and (3) education operating within an ivory tower. (Author/KE)

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CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESSES
IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	IV
Chapter	
I. Planning Courses and Curricula To Meet the Needs of the Students	1
II. The Planning of Objectives in Specific Fields	3
III. Advantages and Disadvantages of the Lecturing Method	5
IV. Group Discussion	7
V. Is the Teacher Really Needed for Instruction?	7
VI. Summary	8
VII. Bibliography	11

INTRODUCTION

Our institutions of higher learning are being significantly altered as people who have either been ignored by the educational system, those who neglected to take advantage of it and those who are returning as employment continues its demands for high level technical and professional skills. There is no doubt in my mind that the curriculum and instruction planners on the university campuses must continue in their attempts to provide quality in meeting the learners educational, vocational and personal-social needs.

PLANNING COURSES AND CURRICULA TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE STUDENTS

At Florida International University, as well as other institutions of higher education, when dealing piece by piece with many of the problems arising from rapidly developing subject matter, our professors and instructors have allowed courses to become over-crowded, or too specialized, or they have presented students with a number of unrelated courses failing to stress common principles. Unfortunately, many have not developed new teaching methods to deal adequately with larger numbers of students. The various new audio-visual techniques tend to be utilized by few enthusiasts despite their great potential for class and individual teaching. Milton (1968) states that "Teaching-learning arrangements have been taken for granted, for the most part, throughout the history of higher education; the instructional procedures and approaches of today are much the same as those of yesterday. Such practices and conditions for learning as frequency of class meetings, the fifty minute hour, lecturing, course loads, grading... rigid degree requirements seem to be accepted by the vast majority of faculty members as established and enduring "truths" for effective and efficient undergraduate instruction."¹

¹ Ohmer Milton, Learning and the Professors (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1968), p. 1.

At this point, I am in no way reluctant to say that trained teachers are rare in universities and usually in technical schools. It is not surprising that teaching staffs have difficulty in devising good courses or carrying them through effectively. In order to continuously restructure and modify curricula as knowledge grows and professional requirements change, experiments will be needed in supplying information to teachers and in providing continuous feedback as to the success of entire programmes, individual courses or of teaching and learning. Mayhew (1971) states that "The establishment, operation, and evolution of the curriculum ought to be the central responsibilities of college faculties and academic administration since the curriculum is the vehicle through which the institution seeks to make its most significant impact on the lives of students. Yet student testimony...does not assign a high value to the curriculum as such ... In many respects, curricula, especially for undergraduates, just grow in response to the organic needs or desires or interests of the individual members of the faculty ... As generations of faculty move on, their memories are perpetuated by the continued catalog listing of courses which reflected their individual tastes and styles."²

² Lewis Mayhew, Patrick Ford, Changing the Curriculum (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1971), pp. 81-82.

THE PLANNING OF OBJECTIVES IN SPECIFIC FIELDS

When long-terms objectives have been decided on, it remains for professors and instructors in each field to plan their own courses and intermediate and short-term objectives which will bring about the desired kind of behavioural changes in their students. The traditional kind of syllabus which consists of a list of topics, or books to be read, does not suffice for this purpose for it fails to specify just what it is that students will learn to do. No doubt the professors and instructors have this in mind, but there is some evidence that unless objectives are both stated and deliberately catered for they tend to be neglected. Intermediate objectives are also needed as goals in learning. Where goals may be too remote there is a tendency to let work slide in the belief that it can be made good later; if they are not clearly defined, the result may well be apathy and inactivity.

Obviously, some kind of feedback is needed to enable any one engaged in learning to find out whether he is doing what is required of him. If he is not told whether he succeeds and has no means to judge for himself there is little point in making further efforts. Haddan (1970) states that "the statement of objectives in precise, behavioural terms, rather than in vague, ambiguous, albeit ideal statements, is hailed by many. Researchers in

curriculum, who favor precise measurements of the degree to which objectives are met, and also individual differences of all sorts, want to know the exact nature of educational aims, so that the outcomes may be compared with them ... One of the best known, most carefully prepared hierarchies of educational objectives is that constructed by Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives."³ Haddan's (1962) final summary for writing objectives follows:⁴

1. A statement of instructional objectives is a collection of words or symbols describing one of your educational intents.
2. An objective will communicate your intent to the degree you have described what the learner will be doing when demonstrating his achievement and how you will know when he is doing it.
3. To describe terminal behavior (what the learner will be doing) (a) identify and name the overall behavior act; (b) define the important conditions under which the behavior is to occur (givens and/or restrictions and limitations); and (c) define the criterion of acceptable performance.
4. Write a separate statement for each objective.
5. If you give each learner a copy of your objectives, you may not have to do much else.

³ Eugene Haddan, Evolving Instruction (Michigan: The Macmillan Company, 1970), p. 77.

⁴ Ibid., p. 88.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE LECTURING METHODS

From my limited teaching experience, exposure as a student (undergraduate and graduate), personal observation and feedback from students at various institutions of learning, it seems that the lecture method of teaching is continuously under attack by students of all walks of life. Some seriously feel that it too often results in passive methods of learning which tend to be less effective than those which fully engage the learner. Consequently, the students often have no opportunity to ask questions and must receive the same content at the same pace. This gives the students no chance at all, or very little, to interject their interpretation of subject matter. To make matters worse, the lectures are usually dry and dull. Eble (1972) states that "despite the innovative practices to be found on many campuses, the dominant mode of instruction remains the lecture or lecture-discussion given on a regular basis ...The students' comments on some of the courses listed --Biology through English--give this view:

lectures were fairly well organized but boring; lecturer, although he usually knew what he was talking about, ... was often disorganized and sometimes had very poor presentation delivery ... too levels of presentation ... book and lectures ... homework and test ... obvious weakness ... lack of discussion sessions."⁵

⁵ Kenneth Eble, Professors as Teachers (California: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1972), p. 3.

Nevertheless, It is only fair to present some of the views of university professors and instructors who are somewhat favorable to lecturing as a method. Beard (1970) states that, "teachers of science consider that lecturing is the best method to open up difficult topics which students cannot undertake unaided ... Despite students' criticism, nearly all teachers claim to cover the syllabus in broad scope and principle, using only sufficient illustration for the principle to be understood. They claim also that in lecturing they can respond to students in a way that teaching aids cannot do, that they are able to show their students how to build up a complex argument or diagram, sharing their enthusiasms for the subject while making reference to recent developments or indicating topics for further inquiry."⁶

Regardless of the pros and cons of the lecturing methods, the main emphasis should be put on learning. If the lecturing method must continue, the modification of the form of the lecture deserves consideration. Maybe the lectures should be shortened followed by problems to work or questions to answer. Many students favor the mechanism of a series of short talks followed by discussion. This has the tremendous value of allowing immediate clarification which facilitates understanding before proceeding to the next topic.

⁶ Ruth Beard, Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (Baltimore, M.D.: Penguin Book, Inc., 1970), p. 92.

GROUP DISCUSSION

As a mechanism for bringing the teachers and students closer to the learning environment, group discussion has become considerably more common in higher education. Some of the rationale behind this mechanism is that students should be helped to discuss and to clarify difficulties arising from lectures or other teaching sessions. Others often feel that it provides opportunities for questions, to help understanding of lecture material, to ensure that our students are not getting lost in their courses, to search for areas of ignorance and to direct attention to those. And, others feel that the greatest advantages in holding group discussions is that it is a way of obtaining more intimate and personal contact with the students than is possible in lectures.

IS THE TEACHER REALLY NEEDED FOR INSTRUCTION?

In addition to the lecture methods and small group teaching, professors and instructors, a small percentage, have been toying with the idea of utilizing systematic instruction in the absence of a teacher or the supplying of information to poorly informed people enabling them to follow complex instructions and make difficult decisions without reference to an expert. Programmed learning, originally devised by

Skinner and now utilized in programmed texts, teaching machines or computerized learning is the most commonly known of these methods. In the early 1960's systematic exercises, based on careful analysis of subject matter, were devised for teaching foreign languages by tapes or in learning by computers. Van Til (1971) states that "the era of instruction that will supersede the era of human-based instruction is to be one of man-machine interaction--and the machine is the computer ... Computers are already demonstrating their usefulness in teaching, spelling, mathematics ... Tapes, screens, records and other audio-visual devices, coupled with the computer make possible a unique instructional system of sight, sound and touch ... Providing programmed sequences by way of computers offers us an efficient means of communicating educational lore. What the teaching profession must do is to legitimize the computer as instructor in those basic areas that can be carefully programmed."⁷

SUMMARY

As professors, as instructors and as college administrators, we must do society and ourselves a needed favor by making fundamental shifts in some of our approaches to

⁷ William Van Til, Curriculum: Quest For Relevance (Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), p. 231.

teaching and evaluation to meet the needs of our students. First, our job should be that of helping each student achieve mastery over some defined portion of subject matter. Secondly, we should adhere to the philosophy that failure by any student putting forth effort is failure on our part as teachers or a breakdown of the selection system. We must get rid of a lot of present practices and irrelevances in higher education.

It is my feeling that we need more student evaluation of faculty as one input in the evaluation process. If you would press me, I would say numerically that student evaluation should be worth somewhere between 20% and 1/3 of the total evaluation process. This focus on evaluation is a reflection of the national emphasis on accountability in all levels of education. If we are to evaluate what we do, then by all means teaching must be evaluated. It is my feeling, and many may not share it, that teaching can best be evaluated through direct, first-hand observation rather than indirect conclusion reached by, say, a review of syllabi. From the faculty standpoint, this perhaps is one of the most detested activities that one's superiors can indulge in. Stripped of the emotional overlayer, however, direct evaluation of teaching can be a very helpful activity to those professors and instructors who are in urgent need of guidance. All teachers, one can safely say, can always improve their techniques.

The curriculum planners must continue in their attempts to provide both quality and equality in meeting the learner's educational, vocational and personal-social needs. Because of technological advances it is feasible for students and faculty to pursue both individual and coordinated group programs of study and research. We must continue to put more emphasis on combining the resources of universities, museums, theaters, libraries, research institutes, hospitals and other public and private institutions to create a highly responsive environment for education, health and leisure for people of all ages.

Finally, education--operating within the ivory tower with its formal lectures, class assignments and removal from many of the reality aspects of life, could and will certainly disappear as the interrelatedness and interdependence of varied educational resources are recognized as being more important than any single organization operating separately.

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